

"HOMMERIN' THE LEATHER."

A WORD WITH OUR BOYS.

BY J. J. WAINWRIGHT.

At that period of my life when I was a dunce at syntax, but a dab at taw, we lived in the quiet little country town of Guzzleton. In those days British youth shod itself with boots called "bluchers," and my bluchers were always made by old Jemmy Clark, surnamed by his customers "Old Hommerin' Clark," or simply "Old Hommerin'," without the Clark.

I daresay he was at bottom a very harmless old fellow, but he looms on me through the mist of years as the ogre of my early life, the chief bane of my existence, next to Greek irregular verbs and going to church twice on a Sunday.

He was a very fat old chap, and, at home, was never seen by mortal except in shirt-sleeves and paper cap, and with a large "leather lapstone" on his knees. His wife was a little parched-up old woman who seemed to never leave off stitching patten leathers, except when she laid them down to serve a ha'porth of toffee, or sugar-stick, or "black-ball," this last being a sweetmeat originally invented, I believe, to facilitate the cutting of the young Briton's second teeth, by gently extracting his first set at as early a stage as possible.

Old Hommerin' used to come to our house periodically and measure us all round for boots or shoes. Knowing his "masterly inactivity"—Fabius could not hold the candle to him in that respect—my father always ordered our boots months before they were really wanted, but no matter how distant might be the date agreed on for delivery, they never by any chance came to time.

In a month or so after the order was given, I used to begin calling on him about twice a week on my way to school, when some such dialogue as the following always occurred before I could get any definite answer:—

"Good morning, Mr. Clark."

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He always spoke very slowly, and seemed to weigh each word before he parted with it. He would reply,

"Hel-lo! hel-lo! Well now, if it ain't Master Johnnie. Good mornin', Master Johnnie. Missis, here's Master Johnnie. Now I shouldn't wonder if he ain't come about his bluchers."

"Yes, Mr. Clark."

"Ah, now. Well, now, I reckoned so. How's thee feyther, Master Johnnie?"

"Pretty well, thank you, Mr. Clark. Are my boots finished?"

"Let—me—see, now. Let—me—see." Reflectively.

The aggravating old villain knew well enough they were not finished, perhaps not even begun; but he always put on an abstracted look as if he were diving fathoms deep into the wells of his memory.

"Ah, now. Them bluchers. Let—me—see. How art thee gettin' on wi' thee schulin', Master Johnnie? Get any prizes last half?"

"Yes, Mr. Clark; writing and arithmetic."

"Well now. Hark at that, missis! Chip off the old block. Thee feyther was a rare 'un at quilldrivin', and so he was at sums."

"Was he, Mr. Clark?" I had heard him say the very same thing a hundred times before, but I always thought it good manners to seem interested.

"He just was that. He could do that sum about the hoss's shoes, a farthin' for the first nail, you know, and keep doublin'."

"Yes, Mr. Clark; so can I."

"Hark at that, missis! Chip off the old block. Ah! I knowed thee feyther when he was just such a whipper-snapper as thee art."

"Did you, Mr. Clark?"

"I did. I was a 'prentice in them days, and my master used to mak' his boots, and thee grandfeyther's as well, and all thee uncles' boots."

"Yes, Mr. Clark. Please are mine done?"

"Quilldrivin' now. Can thee do German Tex'?"

"Yes, Mr. Clark."

"And Old English?"

"Yes, Mr. Clark."

"And printin'?"

"Yes, Mr. Clark."

"Hark at that, missis! Chip off the old block, ain't he? Thee feyther was a rare 'un at German Tex' and Old English, and print he could wonderful—Roman and Gothic and all sorts. Can thee flourish?"

"Yes, Mr. Clark; Ms and Ws."

"So could thee feyther. He was a rare 'un at flourishin' He could flourish all through the alphabet wi' his eyes shut. Can thee flourish angels and eagles?"

"No, Mr. Clark."

"Thee feyther could. He could do 'em like winkin'. He could flourish angels and never take his pen off."

"Mr. Clark, it couldn't be done."

"Couldn't be done!"

"No, Mr. Clark, it couldn't be done. How could he do the features without taking his pen off?"

"Feeturs!" scornfully.

"Yes, features, Mr. Clark; they couldn't be done."

"Perhaps they couldn't be done, now—a—days, but they could in thee feyther's time."

This with supreme contempt.

"Very well, Mr. Clark; but when will my boots be done?"

"Ah! Boots. Let—me—see. Tongues now. Do thee learn tongues?"

"Yes, Mr. Clark; Latin and Greek."

"Hark at that, missis. Chip off the old block. Thee feyther was a rare 'un at tongues. Can thee say bonus bonum?"

Then I had to decline bonus, while he listened in rapt attention with his head critically on one side until I reached bonorum, when he would always stop me with "Ah! bonorum," and remark that I was "a chip off the old block, but I should never be so well grammared, or such a quilldriver, as my feyther."

"But the boots, Mr. Clark; the boots, you know?"

Then, after pondering deeply for a minute or two, he would say, "No, my lad, no. They ain't what you may call quate finished. Not quate; *but*" (and here he would brighten up quite cheerfully)—"but I'm thinkin' about hommerin' the leather, my lad; I'm thinkin' about hommerin' the leather."

It was ever thus. For weeks he was always "thinkin' about hommerin' the leather;" for weeks longer he had really

"begun hommerin' the leather;" then he had actually "finished hommerin' the leather;" then he had "cut 'em out;" then he had "closed the uppers;" then he had "put 'em on the lasses;" then he had "took 'em off the lasses;" and so on by easy stages until the devoutly wished for consummation was reached at last, and the boots came home in triumph.

On one occasion his everlasting excuses drove me to the verge of despair. It was nearing Christmas; the holidays had begun; frost had set in, and skating on the pool was imminent.

"Mr. Clark," I said, "if the leather was finished hammering, could they be done by Christmas Day?"

"Well now. Let—me—see. Well, happen they might."

"Very well, then, Mr. Clark, if you'll give me the leather, I'll finish hammering it myself."

"Eh! Eh, my lad!"

"Yes, Mr. Clark," I continued, recklessly; "there's a stone in our garden as big as your lapstone, and if you'll give me the leather for mine and Tom's bluchers, we'll hammer it all day long; take it in turns, you know."

"Eh, my lad!" he repeated, looking quite bewildered.

"Yes, Mr. Clark; everybody says the pool will bear by Christmas Day, if not before, so we *must* have our new boots by Christmas Eve. We must, Mr. Clark; and please make them lace very tight for skating."

The old man gazed on me through his spectacles in a kind of stupefaction, pushed his paper cap to the back of his head, took off his spectacles and wiped them carefully while still gazing, and at length gasped feebly,

"Hark at that, missis! Hommer the leather hisself! Ever hear o' such a thing? Chip off the old block. Skatin'! Thee feyther was a rare 'un for—well, well, thee sha't ha' thee boots; thee sha't ha' thee boots o' Christmas Eve."

And I did have them on Christmas Eve; and on Christmas Day I went through the ice at a part marked "Dangerous" in company with another young barbarian, but was fished out, and being taken home very cold was promptly threshed warm again by my father. He used invariably to scourge us for anything of this kind, but whether it was for escaping danger, or for running into it, or merely on general principles, he never took the trouble to explain.

Now you will understand this o'er true tale is told merely to point the moral of what follows.

This "hommerin' the leather" is what we are all at, more or less, from the cradle to the grave. If I were a church parson, or, indeed, any other sort of parson, I could preach a fine sermon on this text; but here is not the place for it, so I will confine myself strictly to the secular aspect of "hommerin' the leather."

Take my fellow-clerk Jack Vivian. The great ambition of Jack's life is to be sent out to our branch in South America—at least Jack is always saying it is. There will be a good vacancy next year, and twelve months ago the governor promised it to Jack on condition of his learning the Spanish language before going out. Jack is always going to learn Spanish, but is never learning. He is always going to buy the requisite books, but is never buying. He is always going to look out for a teacher, but is never looking. He is always going to chuck up lawn-tennis, you know, and work up Spanish, you know; but lawn-tennis still remains unchucked, and Spanish still remains unworked. Like Mr. Pecksniff's horse, Jack is always going to go and never going. The last time I goaded him on the subject he told me that he really was now giving the whole of his mind to it, and as soon as he had time to get some bookshelves put up in his bedroom he should buy a heap of Spanish books, look out for a Spanish teacher, and learn the language at a rate that would astonish my feeble mind.

All things are possible, but I shall be astonished, and more than astonished, if Jack should learn Spanish, or, indeed, if he should ever get those bookshelves put up until it is too late; for time is flying, and young Ollendorf, one of our junior clerks who came over from Deutschland only a year ago, has already learned Spanish; and moreover he talks and writes it grammatically, which is what the young Briton who "just picks it up, you know," never does. He has actually learned that language since he made his descent on this country—German, English, and French he brought with him—and I have little doubt that it is he and not Jack who will go out to the South American branch. Jack has spent a whole year in merely thinking about hommerin' the leather, and in the meanwhile young Ollendorf has not only finished hommerin' the leather

but has got his Spanish boots on, well made, well fitting, and he is quite ready for marching orders.

But, bless you! those dreadful Teutons are always *going*; they never stay "going to go." They always keep plodding on. When Ollendorf arrived here, fresh from the village of Nichtszuessen in Krautundwasserland, his handwriting was of the most exasperating Teutonic fashion, and his apparel was that of his own native wilds; but now his writing is fair and goodly as that of a law stationer, and his apparel is as that of the ordinary civilised Briton. I must admit, however, that in this latter respect he cannot for a moment be compared with Jack, whether Jack be arrayed modestly in Christian garb, or gorgeously in full lawn-tennis costume. In such comparison Ollendorf is simply "nowhere," while Jack is unquestionably "all over the place." Ollendorf's pay is only a pound a week at present, but on that he contrives to live respectably and pay for lessons in Spanish, or shorthand, or anything else that will help him to get on in the world. He never halts; his motto is always the same as old Blucher's on that memorable day of June, "Vorwärts. Wir müssen vorwärts." It will be the same in South America, and out of his salary of fifteen hundred or two thousand hard dollars, he will save a thousand or *more*, while his English fellow-clerk at the same salary will save a hundred or *less*. And Ollendorf's salary will increase much faster than his expenses. In seven years he will be a partner in the house, or if not, he will start for himself, with, perhaps, only a moderate capital in money, but with a practically unlimited capital in the shape of education, thrift, knowledge of business, and above all, unremitting industry. If you look for Jack in seven years, you will probably find him—still thinking about hommerin' the leather.

You do not catch the Teuton of these days mooning away his life without any sane object in view. The young Werthers of Fatherland do not bring their miserable "sorrows" to this country; indeed I am strongly of opinion that the historical idiot of that name was the last of his race, and one ought to rejoice if the species to which that young man belonged is extinct. There is a very fair prospect of Young Ollendorf crowding Young Bull out—commercially at all events. And here comes the gist of my remarks. To prevent extinction, Young Taurus, you must get yourself educated—yes, educated. Do not storm. What you are fatuously pleased to call your "education" has

cost about four times as much as Young Ollendorf's education cost, but Young Ollendorf has acquired about four times as much knowledge as you have; I mean knowledge of the kind that is likely to aid either him or you to rise in life. Also, Ollendorf does not delude himself with the childish idea that when he has left school he has "finished his education;" he is not such an idiot as to believe that any man ever does that on this side of the grave, even if he should ever do it on the other. He keeps pegging on at studies of some direct practical use; and this is the reason why Ollendorf so often passes the winning-post, while Bull is so often distanced. I know all about sacrificing to the Graces, sporting with Amaryllis in the shade, *dulce est desipere*, and all the rest of it. I know it all by heart, but I also know that all these things, though good enough *in loco*, must invariably be your second consideration, and never be your first, if you have any wish whatever to hold your own in the now-days world.

And now, as the preachers say, "One word before we part." Get rid of your stupendous British conceit, Young Bull; lay yourself to work in earnest, Young Bull; or rest assured that Ollendorf will have put his boots on, will have marched ahead, and will have crowded you out, while you, my Tauriculus, are only just beginning to think about "hommerin' the leather."

THE EDUCATIONAL IDEAL OF THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY.

BY FREDERICK J. SNELL.

The most celebrated educationalist of the seventeenth century was unquestionably John Amos Comenius, and it is with his name that the proposals hereafter to be criticised are chiefly identified. There seem, however, to have been other *avatars* of the divinity which presides over education, and it is certain, unless appearances are deceptive, that Comenius' ideas were not in any exclusive sense his own. They belonged to the age, and were, so to speak, "in the air." The Pole may indeed have been first in point of time, but that is a trivial matter considering that his English compeers, the one by implication, the other in set terms, disown any indebtedness to him. In stating that his inclination does not lead him to search what modern Januas and Didactics have projected, Milton certainly sets up a claim to originality, and, to banish all doubts on the subject, proceeds to describe his observations as the "burnishing of many contemplative years." Lord Herbert, of Cherbury—for he is the other reformer I am thinking of—alludes to Comenius, but in rather a distant tone, and it is not likely that he would have gone out of his way to incorporate in his memoirs a scheme of education which he did not believe, in all essentials, peculiar and personal. Else there is nothing strange, for the phenomenon of educational theory may often be accounted for thus:—

One of the most general characteristics of men of genius is a certain wilfulness. The tendency betrays itself at an early age, and the embryonic great man insists, among other things, on taking his education into his own hands—not disdaining perhaps the assistance of others, but acting on the whole in conformity with his own opinion of what is best. In attempting to mould himself he of course succeeds, but it is inevitable that he should have made mistakes. These, on a retrospect, etch themselves on his mature judgment as with a corrosive acid, and